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"YES, I DO MEAN IT, BANTAN; AND HERE IS THE PROOF OF IT!"

OR, DAN DUNCAN'S DOUBLE DROP.

A STORY OF
DETECTIVE LIFE in the BOWERY.

BY J. C. COWDRICK,
AUTHOR OF "BROADWAY BILLY" NOVELS, ETC

CHAPTER I.

DETECTIVE AND AIDE.

ONE was a lad fifteen years of age; the
other a youth of twenty.

It was night. They were standing under

the glare of one of the electric lights in Union Square.

The first mentioned, Billy Block, or Bantam Billy, was small for his age, was fairly well dressed, and had a keen, intelligent face and a pair of snappy bright eyes.

The other was of medium height, of strong build, and had a face expressive of determination. He was good-looking, and his full, dark eyes had a penetrating glance. He was known as "Dunk Duncan"—otherwise Duncan Douglas, a detective expert.

"Yer don't mean it, Dunky!" the younger exclaimed.

"Yes, I do mean it, Bantam," asserted the other, "and here is the proof of it!"

He held up his right arm, pulled back the sleeve with the fingers of his left hand, and there, on his wrist, displayed a broken handcuff.

"Yer name is Dennis now, Dunky, for sure," said the other, extending his left hand emphatically. "Yer will never git sight of Kilgore Stiver again, an' you kin bet on it."

"We'll see about that, Billy Block," rejoined the expert. "I am now all the more determined to get him. I had him dead to rights, and would have gotten away with him if I had had another minute before the gang got onto me, but they dumped my cart."

"An' dat is what dey's goin' ter do every time, cully, you see. Don't believe I kin ever put you onto him again."

"Maybe not, Billy, but I'll have him just the same; I vow it. As for their dumping me again, they will find that Duncan Douglas is not to be trifled with twice the same way."

"Lucky fer ye dat dey didn't crack your cocoanut," suggested the lad.

"I admit it. They would have done so, I know, if I had given them any trouble."

"Which yer didn't?"

"Not a bit. I saw that it was dead against me, and let them have their own way."

They sat down on a bench near at hand, while talking, and the younger of the pair was fairly bubbling over with eager excitement. He could hardly contain himself.

"How did it happen, Dunky?" he asked. "Tell a feller all about it, won't yer?"

"Certainly I will, Billy."

"Go ahead, then, and let 'er flicker."

"Well, you see, I got the crude note you sent me, saying that you had located the escaped convict at No. — Bowery, and I was certain that I had him as good as caught, then."

"But, yer hadn't."

"Yes, I had! Don't this show for it?" and he gave the handcuff a rattle.

"Dat's so. Go ahead, cully!"

"You are pretty familiar, Bantam; but no matter. Well, here is the whole thing in a nutshell, for you are entitled to know 't, having put me on the fellow's track. Instead of coming right here to meet you, as you asked me to do, I thought my chance would be better if I went for the fellow at once."

"And yer went?"

"Well, rather! I dropped in, and being familiar with the lay of the land, walked right through as if I belonged there. I hadn't gone far when I came to a door that was locked, and I believed that I had located my man. I knocked, and he asked who was there. I knew his voice, and gave the name of one of his pals, and he opened the door at once."

"Bully fer you, Dunky!"

"I nailed him, on sight, and you

know that I am some in a scrimmage. The tussle lasted for about half a minute, and then I had the pulse-coolers on him, one on his arm and one on my own. But he had let out a yawp meantime, and just about the time I was going to drag him out, into the room popped four of his chums, and they made it hot for me, you can well believe."

"Wonder they didn't do ye fer keeps, Dunky."

"They would if they'd dared to, I believe. As it was, they didn't know but I had backing close at hand; so they made me their prisoner and got down to work in a jiffy. They brought a file, and in a short time they had my man away from me and let him scoot. In fact, they all scooted, after tying and gagging me, and I was a deuce of a while getting free. When I got out, not a sign of 'em was to be seen, and I have hurried here to meet you to see if you know any more of their secrets."

"See what comes of not havin' yer pardner with yer, cully!" reminded the little chap, speaking as if he meant even more than he said. "Now, if yer had only come to me first, and let me piloted ye, it would been all day with Mr. Kilgore Stiver, I'm tellin' ye."

"What could you have done, you little rooster?"

"Huh! what couldn't I done? I could fetched the perlice while you said scat! and scooped the hull kit an' b'illin' of 'em!"

"Maybe so, if you had found the police, my boy. They are not always on hand at the minute they are wanted. But that dog is dead. What I have got to do is get hold of Kilgore Stiver again, and I want to know if you have got any more points for me."

"Well, cul, I think mebbly I have, som're in my t'ink-box, if I kin only git holt of 'em. It is like dis: Dey don't know how you got onto 'em, 'less you guv it away—"

"No, they don't know that."

"Well, den, two an' two's four—see? Dey won't go back to de Cherry Street den, 'cause dey will t'ink dat's where you got onto 'em. What dey has done, I take it, was scoot off to Toby Grimm's dive, where dey will t'ink dey's snug as bugs in a rug—see?"

"Ten to one you are right."

"An' if I am, what den?"

"That's the question. It would be all my life is worth to go there, after the last arrest I made, if they happened to get onto me. Do you think you are fly enough to go there and scent him out?"

"Wouldn't wonder a bit, Dunky. If dey git onto my shape an' do me up, I won't never be missed, anyhow."

"You must take care they don't do that, my Bowery Bantam."

"I'll try to, sure enough, you bet!"

"Then you'll let me know; but how?" asked the expert.

"That is fer you to say, Dunky. You a perfesh, and askin' p'int of a kid like me!"

"There isn't a kid in New York better able to give a detective points than Billy Block, the Bowery Bantam. What you don't know about your quarter of the town, isn't worth knowin'," complimented the expert.

"Well, mebbly you's right, Dunky."

"Give me your ideas, then. How do you think you can best do the little trick?"

"It ain't early in de evenin' any more, boss."

"No, it is getting late, true enough."

"And it won't be easy ter sneak in un-

seen—not that they wouldn't see me anyhow, but they'll dead sure s'pect me."

"Yes, that is just what I am afraid of, my boy. But, if we let it go till to-morrow he will be out of the city and away, even if he isn't so already, and that will settle it."

"And you'll be left."

"Badly. And, that's not the worst of it. When it is known that I have had him, and he got away, it will make me feel like hiding my head."

"Huh! Let dem fellers try it themselves, if they think it is a dead easy job to take a prisoner out of a nest like that, alone. Jes' let 'em try it, an' see if they don't change their chune."

"Yes; but your plan—what is it?"

"Well, see how hard dis hits yer: S'pose'n' dat I slides home an' git on me rags, an' go up to der dive wid me boot-black kit on me arm, an' make out I want ter see Jed Darby. I know he ain't in town, fer he has gone ter Boston fer a scrappin' match."

"Ha! that will do nicely. You go there, ask for him, and say you will wait until he comes. But, what if they know where he is, and tell you that he has gone to Boston?"

"Dey don't know it, 'cause he only went dis evenin', and he went off sudden."

"Well, I trust you to work it."

"All right, we'll work it like dis: I'll go dere, and I'll sure find out all I kin. By'm'by, you come in togged out fer a tramp, and if der bloke is dere I'll give ye a sign like dis, an' if he ain't dere, I'll give ye a sign like dat; see?"

"Yes, I see; and in order that you may know me beyond mistake, you will see a streak of smut right across my nose, like this. No matter how I look otherwise, if the streak of smut is there you can make up your mind it is Duncan Douglas. We are going into a wolves' den, my lad, and if we get out with our lives we'll be lucky."

"No matter, cul; I ain't afraid if you ain't, you bet!"

CHAPTER II.

BILLY BLOCK'S STORY.

One of the greatest escapes on record had been that of Kilgore Stiver.

Convicted of murder, his sentence had been withheld for a time, and in the interim he had mysteriously disappeared from jail.

How he had escaped, no one knew, and it was a great sensation. The newspapers were trying to solve it, the police were at it, and every private detective and novice as well.

It had happened one evening about the time the guards were changed, and although they were closely questioned they could throw no light upon it whatever. It was believed that they had somehow aided the escape, but this they denied, and the proof could not be brought home to them.

On the evening in question, the judge who was reserving sentence had come to the jail to see the prisoner for a few moments, to inquire particularly into a certain statement the prisoner had made, and while he was with the prisoner in his cell the guards changed for the night. The judge left a few minutes later, and he said he left the prisoner safe in his cell.

There was the mystery in a nutshell.

While the word of the guardsmen might have been doubted, that of the honorable judge certainly could not be disbelieved.

Detectives watched the guardsmen on duty and off, but all to no purpose.

Not a single thing could be found against them, and suspicion had to be removed. It was darker than ever.

Then presently Kilgore Stiver was seen.

A detective spotted him one night, and made for him, but a crowd got between him and his man, and the fellow got away.

Of course, the man's picture was in the rogues' gallery, and every detective was supposed to know him at sight, so this man's word was hardly to be doubted.

Further proof lay in the fact that the man had made every effort to get out of sight as soon as possible, as if he had recognized the detective at the same moment. Such, anyhow, had been the detective's story, and he was a man whose word was not to be doubted.

This gave new impetus to the case at once, naturally.

Among the best of the private detectives of the city was the young man Duncan Douglas, "Dunk Duncan," as we have explained.

Though the youngest man in his calling, perhaps, he already had won a name equal to the best of the force. He was brave, shrewd, and his strength was proverbial.

Acting upon the story the detective had told, Duncan began looking in a certain quarter, in disguise. And, not only did he look himself, but he engaged a young street scout whom he knew, Billy Block, to assist him, and really he relied more on the boy than on himself.

The outcome of it all, we have seen.

In less than an hour after arranging with the detective at Union Square, as we have narrated, the Bantam entered a dive on — street.

No one who had seen him before would have recognized him now as the same boy. He was ragged and dirty, carried a bootblack's kit, and was altogether a hard-looking specimen of the genus gamin.

He entered as coolly as if he belonged there.

It was a vile hole—a place of which the police, if not actually afraid, were not eager to tackle.

"Well, rags, what do you want?" a man soon demanded.

"Nawthin' that I can't carry, boss," was the prompt response.

"Then you had better take it and git. No room here for your size, sonny."

"Be you boss of ther shebang, Mister Grimm?"

"That's who you are talking to."

"Den I reckon you's de feller I want ter see."

"What for?" and he showed surprise.

"I want ter find Jed Darby."

"And what do you want to find him for?"

"To tell him somethin', dat's all."

"What do you want to tell him?"

"Come, now, dat's private, see?"

"Well, he isn't here, you can see for yourself."

"Now, don't fool a feller, boss. Yer see, I don't know ther man."

"Oh! that is it, eh? Well, nobody is trying to fool you, you young gutter-snipe."

"Den he dead sure ain't here?"

"Dead sure."

"Know where he is, den?"

"No, I do not know where he is. Haven't seen him to-night."

"Reckon I'll have ter wait 'round, den, boss, if you don't 'jeck to dat. I'll hunt a corner."

"Who sent you?"

"Give it up. Got a quarter out of it, dat's all I know."

"I'll give you another to tell me what the message is. It can't be anything private."

"Show up de quarter, boss."

The proprietor of the den took a quarter from his pocket and flipped it up with his thumb.

"There it is," he said.

"Give it here, den."

"You'll tell?"

"Sure."

The quarter was handed over.

"Here you are, and now what is it? I can tell Jed when he comes, and you needn't wait."

"No, yer don't!" demurred Billy. "You ain't goin' ter git me in no fix like dat, boss. Here's yer quarter back again, see?"

"What's the matter?"

"Don't I tell ye dat I wasn't ter tell nobody but you? If de feller ketches me, won't he wring my neck? Well, I should snicker!"

"Oh! I see. You are willing to tell me, but you must remain all the same and see Darb yourself. I see. I see. You are a smart little snoozer, hang me if you ain't."

"Dat's de way it is, boss."

"Well, you can stay, of course; I only thought maybe you would be glad to get out of it, having got your money—"

"Dat am one place where it pinches, boss. I'm to have a big round dollar when I go back with de answer, see? If it wasn't fer dat I wouldn't care so much. I am on de make, an' a dollar is big as a cartwheel to me, see?"

"I see. I see. Well, what is it?"

The proprietor had drawn the urchin a little to one side.

"Why, dey's a scrap on up to Bosting, and dis feller wants ter git Jed Darby in it, see?"

"Ha! is that so? Tell me all about it. What do they want Jed to do? You are a fly one, my lad, no mistake. Tell me all about it, for I may turn dollars on it."

So, knowing all about the matter as he did, Billy twisted it to suit present circumstances and told a story that interested the proprietor of the dive not a little, he being something of a sporting man himself. And what Billy told would be borne out by the facts.

CHAPTER III.

THE BANTAM PLAYS 'POSSUM.

Toby Grimm was a grim man.

He was what is denominated a ward heeler.

That is, he was a graduated tough, who had made his pile.

Let your Bowery tough get a little ahead in the world and he opens a saloon.

The degree of his toughness will, in nine cases out of ten, measure the character of the place he will try to run. Only the rein of the law curbs him, and that not always.

Toby Grimm had been the toughest sort of a tough in his day, and now he was the same kind of a heeler and sport. He displayed a big diamond stud, a stunning diamond ring on his little finger, wore a plaid shirt with the loudest kind of a collar, and carried his cigar in his coarse mouth at the proper angle becoming his station.

His place was in keeping with his appearance.

Outwardly it posed as respectable (!) but within it was rotten to the core.

The proprietor of this den was "boss" in fact as well as in name, and his word there was law. Lesser ruffians feared and obeyed him.

All of which Billy Block knew, of course.

He had not been kicked around on the Bowery ever since he could remember without learning a good deal of the ways of the people who went to make up its populace.

It had been a part of his scheme, on coming here, to engage Grimm in conversation, if he could get started, for if noticed by him he would not be likely to be troubled by any one else. Favor from the proprietor would mean favor from all.

So, when Grimm turned away, the gamin walked to the rear of the room and took a seat in a corner.

The proprietor had promised to point out Darby to him, if he came in, and as Billy knew the boxer would not come in, being even then on a steamer on his way up the Sound, he was booked for as long as he cared to stay.

He was noticed at first, but after a time no one paid any attention to him—which was just what the Bantam wanted.

All this time he had been looking around carefully, surveying every one present.

There was hardly a crook belonging to his own ward but he knew by sight, and more than once he had given valuable information to the police.

He was looking now to find some one whom he knew to be friendly to the escaped convict, or murderer. Finding such a one, it would be an easy matter to learn something about the hiding place.

Anyhow, he hoped it would.

He was on a low settee that ran close along the wall. A table was in that corner, and the settee served as a seat behind it. The end was against the side wall.

Presently, while Billy was watching, a man came into the room by a rear way and looked around as if to discover some one whom he expected to find there.

At sight of him, Billy dropped down on the settee at length, putting his box under his head for a pillow.

He had recognized the fellow, and not wishing to be seen, he now softly pulled the table so close to the settee that it hid him entirely.

Watching the new comer, he saw him advance down the room, and presently another man stepped forward and greeted him.

Billy did not know this second person—did not know that he had ever seen him before. Yet it was plain the two were comrades or pals.

The first, whom Billy knew, was a "heeler," known as Red Murphy, and was a friend of the escaped murderer.

The Bowery Bantam, therefore, had an eye upon the two, and was ready to follow if they left the place. This was just the meeting he had hoped to see.

To Billy's surprise, Red Murphy led his friend to the very table behind which the boy was concealed.

Grimm had gone out for the present.

The two came forward and took chairs on the opposite side of the table.

The Bantam could have touched their legs if he had reached out his hand.

Not to overhear what they had to say would be impossible unless he plugged his ears—which was just what he wouldn't do. He was "onto it for all he was worth."

"Well, you are here," observed Red Murphy.

"Yes, and on a dangerous mission, too, Reddy."

"Right ye are, me boy. But, you don't care a rap for that, Ryan; you ain't afraid, are ye, John?"

"It ain't the safest job in the world, you'll admit."

"Well, that's so, but even if ye get caught at it, what harm done? A big fine will let ye off."

"I don't know about that. I might get sent up. This is the most ticklish piece of work I have undertaken in a long time."

"Well, it ain't dead easy, John, that's so."

"You are right it ain't, Red. Fact of the business is, I don't see how it is going to be done at all."

"It has got to be done, somehow."

"But how?"

"You will have to 'rassle with that, I guess."

"Here is Stiver, at large in New York, but he might as well try to fly to the moon as try to get out of here."

"But you are the man to get him out."

"And how is it going to be done? Every place is watched by the police, and the privates, so he might as well try to get into heaven as out of New York."

Red Murphy grunted.

"That is what you have been fetched here fer," he declared.

"How did he get out of the jug?" asked Ryan.

"Give it up."

"You mean to say you don't know?"

"That's what I don't."

"The mischief! I thought sure you could tell me that, Reddy."

"Well, I can't. He was simply out, and that's all there was of it. Nobody knows how he got out."

"Nonsense! He didn't get out of there without help."

"Who helped him?"

"I believe you know, but won't tell."

"No. I don't know any more'n you do, and nobody else knows."

"He must know himself."

"That stan's to reason, but he won't tell. Who was it sent for you to come here and get him out of New York?"

"Boss Gowney."

"I thought so. You can set it down that he is the one who got him out of jail."

"But he wasn't in the city at the time, I understand. That ain't here nor there, however. Where is Stiver now?"

"Not so loud. He is here in this house."

"Then the thing to be done is for me to see him right away. Anybody know he is here?"

"Nobody but me, Grimm, and maybe Boss Gowney. Come and I'll show ye where he is holed. You can then have a talk with him, and maybe some plan can be hatched for gettin' him off."

They rose from the table and started toward the door at the rear, by which Red Murphy had entered, and Billy Block popped up from his place of hiding to see if the detective had yet made his appearance. At the same moment Red Murphy, chancing to glance back, saw the gamin.

CHAPTER IV.

BILLY AND PARD IN TROUBLE.

The Bowery Bantam knew, then, that he was in for it.

He gave a start—could not help it—and Red Murphy's eyes flashed.

The red-headed tough strode quickly in his direction, and Billy Block dodged under the table and out on the other side.

"What was you doin' there?" cried Murphy, savagely.

"Takin' a snooze," answered the Bantam.

"Ye are lyin' to me."

"How do you know I am? Don't I know best about it?"

"Maybe ye do, but I am goin' to take no chances with ye. Don't ye run, or worse fur ye."

"Keep off!" cried Billy, swinging his box around his head by its strap. "I'll smite ye one on de jaw wid me box, if ye do, see?"

"I'll see your gizzard, ding ye!"

"Not this evenin'."

"I'll show ye!"

Red Murphy made a spring at the boy, but a strong arm stopped him.

"What yer doin' to de kid?" a voice demanded. "Let him 'lone, will yer—see?"

Billy Block looked quickly up.

He beheld about the toughest-looking tough he had ever seen in his life, and he a gamin of the Bowery.

He did not know the man from Adam. He was a fellow of medium height, broad of shoulder and evidently strong of limb, with a face as begrimed with dirt as if it had not seen soap and water in six months.

Across his nose was an extra daub of black, and the Bantam could hardly believe that he saw aright.

Could this be Dunk?

"No, I won't let him alone, see!" cried Red Murphy.

"Mebby you will."

"See here, cully, who are you?"

"I ain't no feller ter fight kids, anyhow."

"Oh! yer ain't?"

"Naw, I ain't," with extreme toughness. "I take a feller my size, every time."

"Mebby you'd like ter take me?"

"I'll have ter, if you go ter doin' anything to this little feller. I am with the weak side in a muss, every time."

The fellow, John Ryan, and many others, had drawn near, and were looking on to see what the outcome of it all would be. A scrimmage in Grimm's place was no rare occurrence.

Meantime, Billy Block had given the detective the signal agreed upon.

Their man was there! his signal said.

"Well, yer hadn't better git into no muss here, I warn ye," cried Red Murphy, boiling with rage. "I'll spat ye once fer luck, if ye don't git out of my way, see?"

"Naw, I don't see nawthin' of the kind, see? You leave de kid alone, an' dat's all dere is of it."

"But I am goin' ter wallop him."

"What ye goin' ter wallop him fer?"

"Fer lis'nin', dat's what! I'll l'arn him somethin', I bet."

"Wuz ye lis'nin', kid?" the detective demanded, turning upon Billy in a curt way.

"I was snoozin', dat's what I was doin'," cried the Bantam.

"What is all this row about, now?"

It was a new voice in the matter, and Toby Grimm was seen making his way to the scene.

"Dis feller has jumped onter me, boss, dat's what," whined Billy, in a plaintive tone. "He says I was lis'nin', an' he is goin' ter wallop me."

"He is all right, Red," informed Grimm.

"I don't know about dat," disputed Murphy. "Me an' dis here gent was a-talkin', an' when we got done dis kid popped his head up from behind de table."

"An' you know I was waitin' ter see Jed Darby, boss," pleaded Billy.

"Yes, I know you said so."

"But what was he layin' down fer?" demanded Murphy. "We couldn't see him layin' down, could we?"

"I was sleepy," explained Billy, "an' jist took a snooze."

"Ye lie, cuss ye! Ye wasn't no more sleepy 'n I be."

"How do you know I wasn't?"

"Yer was too wide awake. Yer was lis'nin', dat's what yer wuz doin'."

While this was being said, Grimm had exchanged a few words with Ryan. Grimm now caught hold of Billy by the arm.

"I believe you were lis'nin', hang ye!" he cried. "Own up to de truth, now!"

All that part of the room was now giving attention, and the three men immediately concerned looked dark and furious. And no wonder.

"Naw, I wasn't lis'nin'!" protested Billy. "What wud I be lis'nin' fer, anyhow?"

"That is just what we want to know."

"Well, I dunno."

"I believe you came here with a lie, anyhow," asserted Grimm.

"Well, don't need ter blame me fer what ye believe, do ye? I told ye ther straight gab; that's what I give ye."

"But, Jed Darby has already gone to Boston."

"Gone to Boston? Ye don't say!"

"Yes, I do say. He went to-night."

"Then I ain't got no more biz 'round here. Bid ye good-night."

And, so saying, the lad made a start for the door, but Grimm held on to him and he did not get away.

"That was purty cute," said the proprietor of the den, "but it didn't work. You will go when we get done with ye, not before, see? What did you hear these gents sayin'?"

"You have scared it all out of me," answered the gamin.

"Mighty little you are scared."

"But I am, though. You jes' feel o' my pulse, if ye don't believe it, boss."

"You have got too much lip. I am going to take care of you here for a day or two, do you know that? Your folks can spare you, I guess."

"Dat's what ye better do," answered Red Murphy.

"Sure," Ryan added.

Grimm started to drag Billy away in the direction of the rear door, but the Bantam began to kick in a way that made it interesting.

He not only kicked, but he yelled as well.

"Lemme go!" he shouted.

"Why don't you interfere now?" demanded Red Murphy of the tough who had protected Billy against him.

"I ain't got no call to, if he was really doin' somethin' he hadn't orter, see?" answered the detective. "It ain't no funeral of mine, anyhow."

"You show good sense."

"I ain't no fool, mebbby."

"Let go me!" screamed Billy. "I'll yell perlice, if ye don't!"

"Yell an' be hanged to ye!" grated Grimm. "Perlice know better'n to come in here. They know me, they do, and keep hands off when I say so."

"What kid have ye got there?" suddenly asked another new voice on the scene. "Why, hang me if it ain't the Bowery Bantam! What are ye doin' with him, Grimm?"

"Hello, Boss Gowny, that you? Why, we caught him lis'nin', and I am goin' to take care of him—"

"Lis'nin'? Who was he lis'nin' to? He stands in wid de perlice, dat kid does."

"Ye don't say!"

"Yes, I do say," assured Boss Gowney. "And who is this other feller? I heard ye say that he had tried to interfere. Red. Is that so?"

"Yes, dat's so. He set out to take de kid's part, but he has taken water on dat. Guess he has found dat it was more of a lump dan he could swoller whole, see?"

"I mean to see who he is, that is what I mean to see," growled Gowney. "Ten to one he is a police sneak, and if he is, we have got to take care of him, and of de kid, too, if he has been lis'nin' to anything important. You know best about dat, Red."

CHAPTER V.

BANTAM IS MISSING

"Boss" Gowney made a stride toward Douglas.

About the time that he did so something happened, and Gowney would have found it difficult, in the instant, to tell what.

There was a twinkling shadow before his eyes, a sharp spat! and Mr "Boss" Gowney was sent staggering backward until a table caught him, seeing more stars than there are in the firmament.

The others knew what had happened.

The fist of the hard-looking tough had shot out from the shoulder and patted him.

"I don't 'low no man ter call me a p'lice sneak, see?" he growled, putting out his under jaw in the true tough style. "Anybody else here want ter see who I am?" and he glared around, defiantly.

"We all want to know who you are," put in Grimm. "What is more, we are going to know who ye are."

"Is that so?"

"We'll show ye."

In the instant of excitement, Grimm had let go his hold upon Billy, and the Bantam made a dash for the doors, but Red Murphy, now on the alert, nabbed him.

"No, yer don't!" he cried jerking him back again.

By this time, brief as it had been, Gowney had regained his footing, and he now shouted:

"That feller is Dunk Duncan, that's who he is!"

"Duncan, the detective?" asked Ryan, in trepidation.

"Just him, and nobody else!"

There was a threatening growl all over the room.

The detective laughed outright. It seemed to amuse him greatly.

"A fine detective I am," he cried. "Better send up fer his nibs de chief, and find out who I am, anyhow. Dis is de best joke I ever had played on me!"

"That is who he is," insisted Gowney. "We know what he is here fer."

"And this rat was sent ahead of him to learn somethin'."

"Dat's it, exactly. We have got 'em."

And it looked as if they had, too.

They were inclosed in a circle of hard customers, and it did not look as if they could possibly get out of it.

"That is the whole programme," answered Grimm. "I see it now, clear as can be. This rat said he came here to see Jed Darby, when he must a knowed Jed was away already."

"Couldn't help knowin' it," snarled Gowney, who was nursing his injured eye.

"Well, what yer goin' ter do about it?" demanded the detective.

He was standing in a careless attitude.

Grimm gave a signal.

In an instant half a dozen men hurled themselves upon the suspect, and the struggle commenced.

The detective fought like a Hercules, and in less than two seconds no less than four broken noses could be counted, and the owners of those four noses were out of the fight.

He shook them off right and left.

"Tell me he ain't Dunk Duncan!" cried Gowney. "No other feller could do that."

He is our mutton," authoritatively announced the proprietor. "Lock the doors, somebody, and be as quiet as you can about it. We'll fix him off, you bet!"

Fights were soon settled in Grimm's dive—settled always one way.

It was going that way this time; Douglas could not hold out long against such odds.

But now his turn came. In a momentary respite, when one hand was for the instant free, he put a whistle to his lips and blew a deafening blast for police aid.

That settled the question, if there had remained any doubt as to his identity. They knew him now, and it was of the utmost importance that they did not allow him to get away.

The struggle continued.

It was already of some seconds' duration.

That it must soon end was apparent, and Douglas had one object to accomplish first—to liberate his little aide, the Bantam, with the hope that he would make his escape from the den and bring help.

Seeing his opportunity, he seized it.

He managed to break away for an instant from those who were holding his right arm.

Out shot his fist, straight from the shoulder, and Red Murphy was not quick enough to avoid coming into contact with it, getting it in the neck.

Over he went, and in the same instant Billy Block disappeared from sight, no one noticing where he went to. In fact, he was not thought of in the melee that ensued.

The crowd was pressing toward the rear door.

Duncan was now overcome and rendered helpless, and was dragged into the rear room.

The door closed upon him there; the trouble was all over so far as the outer room was concerned, and, had the police come in, nothing would have disclosed what had been going on.

Once in the room, they locked the door.

Half a dozen fellows were holding fast to their man, and it was useless for him to strain himself further.

He was breathing heavily as it was, and had about used himself up for the time being, and they knew it. Red Murphy wanted to get at him and kill him.

"Let me get at him!" he cried.

"No, hold your temper," ordered Grimm.

"Look at de eye he has guv me, will yer?"

"We had to expect something from Dunk Duncan. The wonder is he didn't shoot."

"What are you going to do now?" asked the prisoner. "You have downed me fair enough, about a dozen to one. Yer da'sn't take me man to man, not one of ye," still playing the role of tramp.

"Haven't you had enough?" demanded Gowney.

"I'd like ter give enough."

"What is the use of yer tryin' to p'tend dat you ain't a detective?" cried Murphy. "Look fer his badge, fellers."

No second suggestion of that kind was wanted.

They threw open the detective's coat at once, but not a sign of a badge was to be seen.

"Well, are ye satisfied?" cried Duncan.

"No, we ain't!" insisted Murphy.

Look fuder, boys."

They made a thorough search, but nothing was found save a pistol.

"Why didn't ye use this?" one demanded.

"Do yer think dat I go about shootin' me friends?"

"We ain't yer friends."

"I don't know as ye are me foes, either."

"Pshaw!" put in Gowney, "what is the use of this? Didn't he blow a p'lice whistle? What more do we want?"

Short as the time had been, that point seemed to have been forgotten, but it was remembered now fast enough. And, it was strange that whistle had not been found.

"An' where's dat kid?" suddenly demanded Grimm. "Red Murphy, have you allowed him to git away? Yer have, sure as guns! Git out and after him, quicker'n lightnin'! He'll have der perlice down here in no time. Quick! while we put this feller out of sight!"

CHAPTER VI.

WHERE BILLY WENT.

"Blazes!" cried Murphy.

He opened the door and went out, one hand to his injured eye.

"The jig is up, if that kid got away," concluded Ryan. "I don't want to be caught here."

"They won't get in here, if he does fetch 'em," assured Grimm. "I stand in O. K. wid the p'lice. Dey won't bother much 'round here; if I tell 'em it is all right, all right it is."

"But if they think Douglas is here, what then?"

"But he won't be, see?"

"How is dat?"

"I'll let 'em search, if dey want to."

"And they'll find—"

"No dey won't find him," was the quick interruption as if the proprietor feared what was going to be said. "I will take care of dat."

"How will yer?"

"See dis place?"

He touched a spring and opened a panel.

"You will put him in there?"

"What better place?"

"But he will holler out."

"Will he? Not if we gag him."

"Something has got to be done, sure," asserted the man Ryan, with emphasis.

And this is what we'll do, without any more palaver about it," declared Gowney.

They proceeded to do it.

Meantime, Red Murphy was having a lively hunt for Billy Block.

"Did anybody see dat kid?" he demanded, as soon as he went into the main room of the dive.

"Naw, nobody seed him," some one answered.

"Did he go out, Mike?"

"That to the man at the bar."

"Naw, he didn't go out; that I'll swear."

"Did anybody see him?" Murphy shouted.

It seemed that nobody had seen him, for no one said so.

"Who unlocked the door?" demanded Murphy. "He didn't go out 'fore it was unlocked certain."

"I did," answered Mike, "but not till the scrimmage was over."

Red Murphy was redder than ever; he rushed around, with one hand over one eye, eagerly looking and inquiring for the Bantam.

But Billy Block was not discovered; he was "out of sight," sure enough.

The moment he had been released, when Duncan sent Murphy over, he had dodged under a table.

The next moment, as we have seen, the fight was at its hardest, and he dodged from his first place of shelter into the room in the rear, and, as it happened, without being seen.

There he had paused just one second to look around.

In one corner was a pile of chairs, some thirty or forty, maybe, the heap reaching to the ceiling.

These were for use in the main room when business demanded. At other times they were stored in here out of the way, ready at hand at a moment's notice. He spotted that place.

Down he went, flat upon his face, and wiggled under the chairs in no time, clear to the corner.

There he lay as still as a mouse.

The space was so open that he could not have helped being seen, had any one thought to look there.

At the same time, it was a place not likely to be thought of as a place of hiding, for that very reason, and, unless the searcher took the pains to stoop down to look, he was safe.

The deeper shadow in the corner covered him nicely.

Back into the rear room came Red Murphy presently, cursing roundly at the luck.

"Didn't you get him?" demanded Grimm.

"Nary a git; de rat's escaped."

"Then we have got to hurry with this biz. He will have de p'lice down here in no time. Into dat hole wid dis feller, and we'll keep him fer a time."

The hole or cut in the wall was a small one, not more than two feet wide at most, and barely a foot in depth.

The door to it closed tightly as a panel, save that there was a hole at the bottom and another at the top, to admit a circulation of air.

At the top the hole was disguised by a gas fixture, and made to appear nothing more than an ordinary burner and attachment. That same, however, was the thing by which the door was opened.

At the bottom, this air vent would have been taken for a mouse hole.

Into this coffin-like niche the detective was pressed, and the door was closed upon him.

He had been gagged and his hands and feet bound; therefore, apparently, there was no way by which he could possibly help himself.

There he would have to stand till some one opened the door.

"There, curse him!" grated Grimm. "He is safe."

"Yes, and he will be a mummy before he gits out of dere, too, if ye leave him to me," averred the irate Murphy.

"He must stay till we can do our little business," declared Ryan. "I have not come on here from Philadelphia for nothing, I hope. I want to know all about what I'm to do."

"You and I had better have a talk," suggested Boss Gowney.

"Yes, you two must talk right here," informed Grimm.

"With that feller there to hear what we say?"

"Bah! he is safe enough, and he can't hear if you talk low. Besides, even if he does hear, what matter?"

"I won't take the risk," Ryan objected. "Besides, that kid will be back here with the police at his heels, and I don't want to be seen having anything to do with it."

"You are mighty skittish, 'pears to me."

"It pays to be."

"Well, you and Boss go upstairs, then, and talk it over, and I'll take care of the p'lice."

Saying which, Grimm passed out into the outer room, Red Murphy with him. Grimm closed the door after them, leaving the other two to go out by the other door.

The other door, apparently, opened on the hall.

"Well, what's to be done?" asked Ryan.

"We have got to get our man out of New York, that's what."

"And you have got a plan?"

"No, that is what I want you to help me with."

"How did he get out of jail?"

"Nobody knows that."

"Nobody?"

"Well, nobody ain't s'posed to know. But, here we are, talkin' after all. Come on; we'll go up to a room where we can speak out without fear of anything."

"All right, lead the way."

CHAPTER VII.

BANTAM BILLY'S BOLD VENTURE.

"Boss" Gowney opened the door, and they passed out into the hall.

Ryan closed it after them, and the room was deserted, save for the Bowery Bantam.

"Well, here is a go, sure enough," said Billy to himself. "How am I goin' to git Dunky out of that fix, I wonder? Likewise, myself, too. We're in fer it, I guess."

He remained quiet for a time, listening.

Nothing could be heard, save the roar of the street and the babel of voices in the main room.

"May as well be killed first as last, I suppose," said the Bantam to himself. "I won't be gainin' anything by layin' here, with Dunky in that hole in the wall and myself no better off."

He began wiggling out from under the chairs as he had wiggled in.

The room was well lighted, and he did not know what instant the door would open, but he had to take the chances of that.

Little by little he made his way out from under the heap of chairs, till at last his legs were out, then his body, and lastly his head, when he leaped lightly to his feet.

"Dat's bully!" he exclaimed under his breath. "Now, de next move is somethin' else, and what is it goin' ter be? Guess I'll lock dis door fer a minute while I whisper to Dunky."

There was a bolt inside, and he slipped that into place.

"Dere, now I'm safe fer a bit," he said to himself, "if dey don't git in on me by de other door."

He skipped lively and lightly across the floor to where the detective was concealed in the niche behind the panel, and knocking lightly on the panel, he whispered.

"We'll come out on top yet, Dunky, you bet! I can't git ye out right away, but I'll fetch de perlice as soon as I kin and have you out of dat hole or know de reason why. Keep a stiff upper lip till you hear from me again. Dey don't know I'm in here."

There was a grunt in response, the detective being gagged.

"I'm goin' ter try to git more p'int, now," Billy said further. "No one thinks I am here, and mebbly I will make it go all right. If I don't, de worst dat kin happen, dey kin only kill me, and I ain't of much 'count anyhow. You hold de fort, Dunky, till you hear from me again, and den we'll make Rome howl 'round dis ranch, you bet!"

In response to that came a series of very emphatic grunts, but of course Billy could not tell what they meant.

"Dat's all right, cul," he whispered. "I'll git all I kin, you bet!"

Still more emphatic the grunts were heard.

"Don't jest git on to what you say, Dunky," Billy rejoined, "but I take it dat you want me to do my level best, and you kin bet your braces dat's what I will do, every time."

Yet more grunts.

"Wonder what he means?" the Bantam asked himself.

He scratched his head.

It did not occur to him that maybe Douglas wanted him to try to open the panel and set him at liberty.

The reader may have rightly guessed that this was just what the detective did want, but could not make his youthful aide understand it by his mode of grunting.

"You want me to hurry, eh?" said Billy. "All right, cully, I'm off like a shot. You stay there till I come back. Dey don't mean to kill ye, and you can't find a safer place if ye tried. I'll be back here again in a little while."

He hastened off, much to the detective's chagrin.

Stepping lightly to the door that opened into the saloon, he withdrew the bolt.

It would never do for him to leave that door secured, he thought, for that would give away the fact that there was an enemy in the camp, if any one happened to try to get in.

Having so done, he skipped lightly over to the other door.

Opening that, he was out into the hall in a moment, and then began another series of adventures.

The hall was lighted, but not brightly. Only one lamp burned, and that was near the front entrance, where it was incased in a red globe that made it all the more obscure.

The two men had said they would go upstairs.

Billy made his way swiftly along the hall to the front, having made sure no one was there.

Reaching the stairs, he bounded lightly up them, three steps at a time, and was quickly on the next floor, where he stopped to take a survey of his surroundings.

He still saw no one.

There was little chance that he would be heard above the hum of voices in the dive below.

Light shone through the transoms of some of the rooms, and he was at loss which way to proceed or what move to make first. He did not want to make any mistake.

He recalled Douglas.

He wondered if he hadn't already made a mistake in not trying to free him.

Ha! maybe that was what the detective made such a fuss about, when the Bantam was talking to him. He wondered if that hadn't been it.

If so, it was too late now for him to go back to make amends, for he might be caught and neither object accomplished. No, he could not take that risk. He had to go on as he had begun.

Looking up the next flight of stairs, he made sure that no one was in the hall, and began applying his eye to the keyholes.

This was not satisfactory.

He could see only a limited portion of the rooms, and he reached the end of the hall without having made any discovery.

The house, by the way, was something of a fourth-rate hotel, above the main floor, which was occupied as a dive, and all the rooms had transoms over the doors.

If he could only get up and peer in over the doors, he wished.

He stood leaning back in a dark corner.

Something he leaned against moved a little, and he felt to see what it was.

To his immense delight he found that it was a small stepladder, about four steps high, probably used for the purpose of cleaning windows.

It was light, he could easily carry it in one hand, and he picked it up quickly and hurried to the first door, where there was a light in the room, and in a moment was surveying the interior.

He noted all that was to be seen, but it was nothing of interest to him.

He wanted Boss Gowney and John Ryan.

It did not take him a great while to try all the rooms on that floor, and he proceeded to the floor above.

He carried the stepladder on his shoulder, and his heart was in his throat, as the saying goes, for he expected any instant to see a door open somewhere.

There was a light in each of the halls.

On reaching the next floor he thought of turning the light out, and did so.

"Ha! that is better," he said to himself. "Would have thought of it sooner if I hadn't been a lunk altogether. Wonder they didn't name me Billy Block-head."

With the light out in the hall, it was easy to locate the rooms that were lighted within.

The transoms gave forth some light, but there was plenty of shadow, too.

He was on the point of placing his ladder against a door, when another door, further down the hall, suddenly opened, and a man came out.

The Bantam's heart almost stopped beating, for he felt sure that he would be discovered, and that discovery would be the means of getting him into serious trouble.

CHAPTER VIII.

THE BANTAM'S BIG SUCCESS.

To think was to act.

There was no time for consideration.

Right across the hall was a room that was dark.

Billy was at the door in an instant, and softly turned the knob.

The door opened, and he slipped in and closed it after him as quickly as he could.

It was safe to assume that it was not occupied, or it would have been locked, there being no light, yet he could not be sure of that.

He remained as still as a mouse.

The man passed along the hall, passed the door of that room, and went on down stairs.

The Bantam drew a breath of great relief when he had gone, and listened attentively for a moment before opening the door to come forth.

This he presently did.

The hall was now empty, and he proceeded with his work.

Taking the nearest door first, he placed

the ladder against it and carefully stepped up.

He found that he was still at the wrong room, and he proceeded from door to door as quickly as possible, the same as on the floor below.

It was at the extreme end of the hall that he met success.

The last door of all, situated at the end of the passage, was the one he was looking for.

Climbing carefully up, he looked in cautiously, as he had done in every instance, but he had met disappointment so many times that he hardly looked for anything else.

He gave a great start.

Here were three men in earnest conference.

They were Boss Gowney, John Ryan and Kilgore Stiver, the murderer!

Billy Block almost toppled off the ladder in his first surprise.

This was even more than he had dared to hope for.

Here he was, only a "kid," looking upon the very man for whom all the police of the great city were searching!

The transom was closed, and Billy could not hear what was being said, for the men were speaking in low tones. He desired to open the transom just a little, but was fearful of discovery.

It had to be done, if he expected to hear anything.

Drawing down out of sight, he pressed gently with his fingers on the lower edge of the sash.

It did not move, and he feared that it must be fast.

He pushed a little harder.

Presently it moved, and with only the faintest suggestion of a creak, and stood about an inch open.

Billy listened, ready to jump and run if any one came to the door, but no one came, and after a few seconds he ventured to peer into the room again.

The situation remained the same.

Apparently the three men had not heard the slight noise at all.

"Tell us how the trick was done," Ryan was just saying.

"That is something I can't do," said the murderer.

"Why not?"

"I am pledged to secrecy."

"You must have had help."

"I am not saying that I had or hadn't. The thing is as you see it; I am out of the jug, and now I want to get out of New York."

"And you won't tell?"

"No."

"Well, that is your own business, of course."

"And I take it that the last job is going to be the hardest," spoke up Gowney.

"What is that?"

"Your getting out of New York."

"Yes, you are right. I wish it was as easy as my gettin' out of jail was."

"In fact, I don't see clear how it is going to be done," said Gowney, with a dubious shake of the head.

"It has got to be done," said the convict.

"Yes, that is true," agreed Ryan.

"But how?"

"We must take time to think," said Ryan. "You are safe enough here, so long as you keep out of sight."

"I hope I am."

"I am anxious about that confounded boy," growled Gowney. "If he did hear what you and Red Murphy were saying, it may make a deuce of a trouble for us before we get done with the matter."

"Do you think he would dare to come back here?" asked Ryan.

"Hard to tell, for those rats dare do anything. If he stood in with that detective, he is bound to come back."

The prisoner was on his feet.

"And suppose they search the house?" he suggested.

"We'll have to juggle you through the panels, that's all."

"And maybe juggle me back into the jail, with no earthly show of getting out again."

"You could play the same trick again."

"Not on your life."

"Why not?"

"It couldn't be done a second time."

"It's a poor rule that won't work the same way twice, old man."

"Can't help it, that trick could not be done again. It would be utterly impossible."

"And you won't tell me how it was done."

"No, I can't."

"Well, no use asking you to let us in if you won't. The question is now, what is going to be done with you now that you are out."

The three were thoughtful.

The escaped murderer was pacing the floor, his hands behind his back.

He had a hunted, frightened look, and was haggard and nervous in the extreme, afraid of his shadow.

"See here," said Ryan, presently.

"Well, what is it?" asked Boss Gowney.

"You are the man who sent for me."

"I know it."

"What did you want of me?"

"Hasn't that been made clear to you yet?"

"No."

"We want you to smuggle Stiver to Philadelphia and give him a show to get clean off."

"That's all right, but if you didn't have the plan all hatched, what was the use sending for me?"

"We expected you to come prepared to do it for us."

"There it goes again—what do you mean by we? Who is in it with you, old fellow?"

"Why—we,—that is to say, Grimm and I together."

"I know better."

"What do you know?"

"I know that there is a man behind the scene in this business, and he ought to come out and show himself."

"Oh, you are too much given to supposing things. If we had had all the help we wanted here, would we have sent for you, do ye think? Well, mebbe not, I'll say."

"All this chin don't help me a bit," complained the murderer. "If you are going to help me out of here, be about it."

"That is logic," said Gowney. "Let's get down to a plan of some sort and done with it."

"That is the kind of talk that suits me," said the convict. "Let's be about it."

He sat down, and once more they put their heads together.

The Bantam opened his ears.

CHAPTER IX.

UNEXPECTED DISASTER.

Bantam Billy was absorbed.

He was not only listening, but thinking.

What he wanted now was to get on to their scheme, whatever it was.

He had almost forgotten his own danger—that he was likely to be caught at any moment.

His plan was to hear what he could, then slip down and see if he could not

get his friend Douglas out of the fix he was in, and then scoop the set.

It was nearly the same situation that had been found earlier in the evening, which had been discovered previous to the time of the opening of our story, and for the second time that night Douglas had been foiled.

It was rough on Duncan.

He was accounted one of the best detectives in the city, and he would feel it keenly.

The Bantam felt that everything now rested upon him, and he did not want to lose a single point. So he strained his ears to hear what would be said next.

"I have got a thought," said Gowney.

"Let's have it," Ryan invited.

"We have got to rig Stiver out as a woman, and he must pass for your wife."

"Ha! just the thing!" the convict exclaimed.

"Yes, I believe it will work," Ryan agreed. "But if that boy got away this house will be watched."

"They will be looking for a man, not a woman," said Stiver.

"Yes, that's so."

"It is worth trying."

"Will you take the risk, Stiver?"

"What else can I do?"

"You have got to take some risk, no matter how we try it."

"I know it."

"Will you do it, then?"

"Yes, I'll do anything. I have got to get out of here."

"Well, then, let's consider that part of it understood. You are to be disguised as a woman."

"I'll want a veil."

"We'll tog you out in deep mourning. That will make a good excuse for you to keep your face covered."

"We are coming at it now," said Ryan.

"Yes, we'll soon have it arranged. You can go to the P—— Hotel and register for yourself and wife. I'll get the toggery for Stiver and he can come there."

"That is just the ticket!" cried the convict. The idea seemed to suit him exactly.

"That is settled, then," said Ryan, rising. "I want to get out of here as soon as I can, so I will be off. Gowney can do what he has said, and then you come to the hotel as soon as you can."

He stepped toward the door.

The Bowery Bantam was down from his perch like a flash.

"Yes," he heard Gowney saying, "that is understood. No use to talk all night about it."

Billy, with the stepladder on his shoulder, tripped along the hall in the direction of the stairs, but just as he came to them he saw a man coming up.

Here was a pretty pickle.

It looked as if he must be caught this time, for he was cut off in both directions.

He thought of the room he had dodged into before, however, and made for the same door again. This time it was locked, and he wondered what new mishap would come.

Who was in that room?

Had that person come silently up the stairs, and had he been seen listening at the transom?

He did not know, but these thoughts flashed through his head. He made a quick spring for the next door, which opened, and he was no more than just in time.

No sooner had he disappeared than the man came in sight up the stairs, and John Ryan came out of the room where the Bantam had been listening.

It had been a narrow escape.

"Whew!" Billy whistled softly to himself, "but that was a close one fer me. If it had been any closer, I'd been a goner, sure enough."

He waited patiently until he thought the coast must be all clear, and then he cautiously opened the door.

He barely put out his nose at first.

Finding that no one took his nose off, he ventured a little further.

He put out his head, took a good look in every direction, and, seeing no one anywhere about, ventured forth.

With the ladder on his shoulder he made his way down the stairs, and on the next floor left the ladder where he had found it and made haste to get down to the ground floor.

He reached there safely.

At the foot of the stairs he stopped to consider.

Should he go to the relief of his friend, or would it be better to get out if he could?

He did not ponder that question long. If he went to release the detective he might get nabbed, and then ood-by to their success.

On the other hand, if he went out and got hold of a policeman, or went to the nearest station and told his story, the rescue of the detective would be assured.

He decided upon the latter course.

That accomplished, he could then tell the detective what he had overheard.

They could still stand a good chance then of making the arrest and returning the escaped murderer to the hands of the jail officers.

He made for the front door as soon as he came to this decision.

To his dismay it was locked.

He looked to find the key or the bolt that was holding it, but in vain.

Try as he would, and did, it was no use, he could not open the door.

Filled with alarm, he ran to the rear to get out that way.

There was another door at the end of the hall.

But that, too, was fastened.

"Here is a mess!" cried Billy, under his breath. "How the mischief am I goin' to git out of here, anyhow?"

There were two other doors; one of these under the stairs apparently led to the cellar, and the other was the one by which he had come into the hall at first.

As he had no business in the cellar and no desire to see it, he entered the room where the detective was imprisoned.

No one was there.

Everything about the room looked the same.

Ryan must have passed through that way, for it was not likely that he had a key to the front door.

Billy looked swiftly around, and, being sure that he was alone, stepped to the panel behind which he knew his comrade in misery was confined, and he tapped on the panel.

A decidedly energetic grunting was the response.

"I have got it down fine," whispered the Bantam. "I am goin' fer de police now, and I'll have ye out of dat in no time."

Douglas made a noise in a way that fairly startled the Bantam, and he sprang back in alarm. Besides the grunting there was a great pounding, the detective evidently doing it with his head.

"He must mean dat he wants me ter let him out," said the boy to himself. "I'll try it, anyhow."

He stepped forward again, but at that instant he heard the knob of the hall

door turn, and, knowing that discovery was imminent, he made a dive to get under the chairs again.

His haste brought disaster, for before he could get out of sight the door opened and Boss Gowney came into the room. At the same time the Bantam caught fast under one of the chairs and down came the whole pile with a terrific clatter and crash.

CHAPTER X.

BANTAM DOOMED.

The fat was in the fire, truly.

Gowney stopped short, with a look of alarm at first.

Then he broke out into the loudest kind of a guffaw, the humor of it striking him.

"Haw! haw! haw! So, that is where you have been hiding, is it, you whelp?" he cried. "You thought to get your pal out of his fix, did you? Well, we have got you now!"

"You have killed me, dat's wot you have done," wailed the Bantam from under the pile of chairs.

"I have killed you! How do you make that out?"

"You pulled all dese chairs down on me, dat's wot you done."

"Haw! haw! Why, you rat, you did it yourself; what are you talking about?"

The door opened at that moment, the one leading into the main room of the dive, and Grimm and Red Murphy dashed into the room.

"What's up?" cried Grimm.

"Nothin's up," answered Gowney; "it's all down, don't ye see?"

"Who knocked 'em down?"

"Dat kid."

"Where is he?"

"Under de pile."

"Ha! is that so?"

"Sure."

"Bully!" cried Red Murphy. "I thought it was funny if he was out of de crib."

"He was there when we were all in here, then, and he knows where de detective is in hiding."

"Sure he does, but dat is all he knows. He didn't hear nothin' said here dat could do him any good. We have got him."

"Bet your life we have got him, and we'll fix him out, too; you bet we will. Noo York will be minus one dirty kid, sure as you are born. Nobody will miss him."

"Come out from under dere, ye rat!" ordered Grimm.

"I can't git out," wailed the Bantam.

"We'll have ye out, den. Pull away dem chairs, Murph, and it won't take us long ter git him."

Red Murphy and Gowney began to remove the pile of chairs, but as fast as the bulk of the heap was removed to another place the "rat" would be found under it in a new corner.

"Here, we'll stop dat," cried Grimm, and he produced a formidable pistol. "You try dat once more, my boy," he said, "and I'll try hittin' ye wid a pill, see?"

"Yes, I see," said Billy. "Hold on, I'll come out."

He saw that it was useless for him to hold out.

There was no escaping these men now, and it would probably be better not to anger them.

Besides, there was the revolver displayed by the proprietor of the den, and he had spoken in a manner to indicate that he meant business.

So the Bantam wiggled out.

He was instantly seized by Murphy, who gave him a shaking.

"Ye little divil!" the fellow cried. "Fur two cents I would wring de neck off ye!"

"Please, mister, let me go," the Bantam whimpered. "I didn't go fer to do harm, honest I didn't. Please let me go, won't yer?"

"Yes, we'll let ye go, sure," answered Grimm.

"Bet yer life!" cried Gowney.

"Have ye been here all de time?" demanded Murphy.

"Yes, sir," whined the Bantam.

"How did ye git here?"

"I slipped in when you let go of me."

"And what was ye goin' ter do?"

"I wanted to git out, dat was all."

"And what then?" asked Grimm.

"Nawthin'."

"Sure?"

"Honest."

"Nothin' but fetch the perlice here in a rush and rescue yer pal, of course," sneered Murphy.

"If you will only let me go I promise dat I won't fetch no perlice here at all," whined the boy. "You jes' try me an' see if I do. I have had scare plenty enough."

"We'll soon put ye where de wicked cease from troublin'," Grimm grimly hinted.

"Ye ain't a-goin' ter kill me?" cried Billy.

"Not on yer life," sneered Murphy.

"Please don't!"

"Ha! ha! ha! Oh! no, we wouldn't hurt a little chap like you. We'll only put yer to sleep, dat's all."

They all laughed, and the Bantam pretended to snivel and cry. It was the last thing he would think of doing, in reality. He was not that kind of stuff, be assured.

Your street arab, picked up out of the gutters as it were, naturally forgets all about crying ere he is very old.

Billy was playing a part.

"But what is going to be done with him?" asked Murphy.

"That is the question," said Gowney.

"It is for you to say, Grimm. You know your accommodations best."

"We'll drop him below, I guess," said the proprietor.

"All right."

"Where's dat?" whined the Bantam.

"You'll see, all in good time, confound ye," was the retort.

"See here, though," Gowney called attention. "We are talkin' where dere's ears to hear."

"Whose ears?"

"Dat feller's in de wall."

"He is all right, nobody knows he is here."

"Sure of dat?"

"Shows fer itself, don't it?"

"How's dat?"

"If dey knowed he was here, wouldn't dey been in after him 'fore dis?"

"Dat's right, I reckon. Besides, he blowed his whistle and nobody comed in answer to it, shows he hadn't no help around."

"Den we needn't be 'fraid of him, fer we kin send him de same way. It will be a couple of mysterious disappearances, dat's all, or only one, mebby, fer no one will miss dis kid."

"Oh! we are on the safe side all right," said Murphy.

"De whole business is workin' all right."

"Bring him along," ordered Grimm.

He stepped to the rear of the room, where he opened another secret panel similar to the one to the place in which the detective had been concealed, yet showing a different sort of opening.

It disclosed a narrow passage.

The other two followed him, dragging the boy between them.

The Bantam was doing his best to hold back, and he let out one cry for help.

That brought him such a sound thwack on the side of the head, however, that he desisted and kept still.

There was no help for him.

"I'll l'arn ye ter yell like that!" cried Murphy. "You try it once more and I'll knock de whole head off ye!"

Having opened the panel, Grimm stepped back and pointed with his finger into the dark opening it disclosed.

"Right in there with him," he ordered. "Push him ahead of ye, and give him a shove and let him go it. That is the last you will ever see or hear of the little louse, you can bet."

The Bowery Bantam held back like a pig, but it was of no use. Into the passage he had to go, and with a shove he was sent headlong into the undiscovered darkness beyond, and the panel was closed upon him with a sharp click. At that stage of the game villainy was decidedly on top.

CHAPTER XI.

DUNCAN CUTS AND DEALS.

While not exactly a witness, the detective was cognizant of what was going on.

Here was his little ally, the best of the kind he had ever picked up on the streets of New York, being sent to his death, and he utterly helpless to render him aid.

He regretted that Billy had not tried to release him before attempting anything further.

If he had done that, they both might have escaped.

So he thought.

But it had not worked to his liking, and he had to accept it as it was.

Not only had the Bowery Bantam been put out of the way, but he had every reason to fear that he would shortly share the same ill fate.

It would never do for these villains to allow him to escape out of their hands now. He had run his head into their trap, and he must suffer the consequences for his temerity.

He heard all that was said, heard the Bantam's last despairing cry, and heard the closing of the panel door.

His heart seemed to sink.

"Well, there is one of 'em out of the way, anyhow," he heard Red Murphy saying.

"And the other is just as good as there," remarked Grimm. "He will keep where he is for the present. What is the plan for the removal of the party, Gowney?"

"We'd better not talk about that here," answered Gowney. "Our man is safe, but he ain't dead yet."

"Well, I guess you are right. Come on."

They passed on out into the dive proper, and Grimm sent in an employee to stack up the chairs where they had been.

All this time the detective, confined in so narrow a space as he was, had nevertheless been trying his best to get his hands free. Of course, he had met with little success.

He had been too well secured to get the bonds loose in a minute.

His efforts had somewhat loosened the cords, however, and he felt in hopes that he would eventually work his hands loose enough to liberate them.

If he had had more space in which to exert himself he might have done it in a shorter time. That was not to be con-

sidered, though; he was where he was and had to make the best of it.

Lucky for him he had plenty of air.

The place he was in had been made for the convenience of criminals, as a place in which to hide from the police.

Douglas heard the man moving about replacing the chairs in a heap in the corner where they had been piled, and if he had had the use of his tongue he might have spoken to the fellow.

If only an employee there, he might be bought.

But, as said, speculation upon what might have been done under other conditions was useless.

Of a sudden, though, he met with a great surprise.

He could hardly believe it had happened.

It was too good to be true.

His hands came free!

"Ha!" he mentally ejaculated. "Maybe this will work a little better than I dreamed of. We'll see now."

The first thing he did was to work his hands around to the front and bring them up until he got hold of the gag which was in his mouth, which he removed.

That was a great relief.

He then prepared for another scheme that had just occurred to him.

It was useless to think of trying to free his feet, for he could not possibly reach them.

Bracing his back against the wall, he crossed his clinched fists in front of his chest, gathered up all his muscles and waited until he believed it was the right moment.

He could hear the man moving around the room picking up the chairs, and he listened attentively to his movements.

Presently he came near to the secret panel.

Bringing all his strength to bear, the detective applied it with a sudden force against the panel door.

It was sufficient, more than sufficient.

Crash! went the panel, split straight through the middle, and out the detective went.

Had he been able to see, he could not have chosen a more opportune moment. The fellow who was gathering up the chairs was right in his way as he came forth.

Dunk Duncan was a man of quick thought.

And, too, his action was as quick as thought, and in this instance both were like lightning.

He saw the man the instant the panel split in twain, and as he fell forward he grappled with the fellow and both went down to the floor together in a heap.

Dancing was going on in the other room, so they were not heard.

Douglas had his man by the throat instantly.

He could not stand, not having the use of his feet, but what he lacked in that respect he made up in arm strength.

"If you make a sound, you are a dead man!" he hissed in the fellow's ear.

The man struggled his best.

But he was no match for such a giant as Dunk Duncan.

It did not take him long to find it out, and he became as meek and quiet as a lamb.

"There, now, you are showing sense," said the detective, more in a friendly way. "I won't harm you if you will do what I tell you."

"Dey'll kill me if I do, boss."

"And I'll kill you if you don't, so take your choice."

"Well, you have got de best of me,

so what kin I do. Say what it is you want."

"I want you to untie my feet."

"All right, jes' let go of me."

"Wait a second first."

Duncan remembered that his pistol had not been taken away from him.

Releasing the fellow with one hand, he reached around to his hip and brought forth his revolver.

Having that in hand, he let go of the fellow altogether.

"Now, untie them," he said. "At the first sign of shennannigan down will come your temporary tabernacle, sure as you're born."

"You hold the best hand, boss," said the fellow, humbly. "I guess it will have to be as you say. But why not cut the string and save time? I have got a knife."

"All right, go ahead, but mind what I have told you."

"I'll mind it hard enough."

The fellow produced a knife, opened it, and at once cut the bonds that confined the detective's feet.

Douglas leaped to his feet instantly.

"Now, off with your jacket and let me have it," he ordered. "I must get out of here, and this is my chance."

The man put up his knife and peeled off his jacket in a hurry, seeing there was no help for it, and awaited further orders, ready to obey anything rather than risk his life.

"Now hold out your hands," ordered the detective.

"What yer goin' ter do?"

"Bind you, of course."

"What fer?"

"So that you cannot give me away before I can get out of this hole."

"I won't give ye away, honest I won't. You jes' leave me as I am and give me a show to git out, too."

"You mean to desert?"

"Sure. Dey will kill me if I stay."

Duncan thought for a moment, and he quickly decided the point.

Time was too precious and he could not waste any of it. He would not take the fellow's word.

CHAPTER XII.

BAFFLED AT THE LAST MINUTE.

"Can't do it," Douglas told the man. "Hold out your hands."

"But dey will kill me, boss, sure as you live dey will. Give me a show fer me alley, won't yer?"

"I'll fix that all right. I'll bind you the same as they had me, and you can tell them that I jumped out on you and you could not help yourself. They will believe it."

"Yer think so?"

"I know it. They know me."

"Well, I can't help myself, of course."

"Not a bit. If you don't comply, I'll down you and do it by force."

The man held out his hands and the detective speedily had them securely tied together.

He then did the same with his feet, and the next thing on the programme was to put a gag into his mouth, which was likewise speedily accomplished.

"There you are, nice as can be," he said.

He took up the fellow's jacket then, which was a white linen one such as waiters usually wear.

This he put on, tucking up his coat so it could not be seen below the jacket and buttoning it across, all the time keeping an eye on the door.

He had his revolver ready for use.

It was his intention not to be taken again if he could help it, even if somebody got hurt.

His hat was a soft slouch, and that he put under the jacket in front, and as it happened, his prisoner's and his own hair were somewhat alike in color and quantity.

"Now for it," he said to himself.

He stopped to think, to make sure that he was ready.

He ran the situation over in mind speedily, and a sudden thought came to him.

What his prisoner's name was he did not know, and that was a point of vital interest, or so it might prove, at any rate.

He must know it.

Dropping his revolver into his jacket pocket, he stooped over the man.

The fellow looked frightened.

"Don't be alarmed," said Duncan, "I am not going to eat you."

He quickly untied the gag, and as soon as he had done so demanded:

"What's your name? Say quick!"

"Tom Mince, sir."

"What do you do?"

"Wait on tables."

"Suppose you wanted to go right out to the street, would any one be likely to stop you?"

"Mebby not."

Duncan wanted to catch the fellow's voice, in order to imitate it if he had to do any talking.

"Well, that is all I can ask of you, I guess," he said. "You are a fair-to-middling decent fellow, and I'm scrry to have to use you rough."

He prepared to replace the gag.

"You can't never do the trick, though," said the man.

"Why not?" asked Duncan.

"Yer face is too mighty dirty."

The detective gave an impatient start. "What was I thinking about?" he muttered. "I clean forgot that for the moment."

"You had better clean remember it, then, if you hope to get out of here," said the prisoner.

"Where can I wash?"

"Go out of this room, turn to the right, and enter the next door."

"That is a mighty risk to run. Is there no other place? Or no other way to reach that one?"

"No, not another chance."

Dunk hated to replace the gag, but he had to do it.

He would not take the chance of the fellow's playing a trick upon him. He might be working for that end.

Replacing the gag with all haste, for he knew that every minute he wasted counted one against his chances for getting out, he prepared to leave the room.

Another thought had come to him, but he put it away.

The thought had been to let the fellow go free for a moment, if he would promise to bring him a wet towel.

That was not to be considered for an instant.

He thought of a trick.

Taking his handkerchief from his pocket, he held it to his face as if his nose was bleeding, and, with head bowed, hastened from the room.

It was now long after midnight, but the dancing in the place was yet going on, although the crowd had somewhat thinned out. He was seen, but no attention was paid to him.

He turned to the right and entered the first door he came to.

He had been rightly directed.

It was a closet and wash-room and there were soap and towels.

In a moment he was busily engaged washing his face and hands, and in one minute he looked like a different man.

Of course, he did not look enough like the waiter to be mistaken for him, but if not observed too closely he hoped that the white jacket would carry him through.

When he had wiped his face and hands and had taken a look in the glass to arrange his hair like Mr. Mince wore his, he was ready.

He opened the door and stepped out.

At the first table he came to stood a waiter with some glasses on it, and this he picked up.

Holding it so that it partly hid his face, he went down the room in the direction of the bar with hasty strides, hoping to gain the door unchallenged.

He hoped in vain.

He had taken but a few steps when he was called.

He recognized the voice of the proprietor of the place, and he stopped instantly and turned.

Keeping the waiter so he could just look over it, but so that his face could not be seen in full by any one sitting down, he responded, imitating the voice of the fellow he was personating:

"Yes, sir."

He saw Grimm, Gowney and Murphy all seated at a table.

"Did you get them piled up?" the proprietor inquired.

"Yes, sir."

"All right, go on."

Duncan hurried on, thinking that he had escaped.

He made straight for the bar, intending to put down the tray and reach the street with a couple of strides.

It worked as planned, and he would have been successful, but for one thing—perhaps more properly two things, but certainly for one.

He reached the door, but it was locked.

Meantime Red Murphy had leaned over and whispered a word to Gowney and Grimm.

They both started, turned and looked in the direction of the supposed Tom Mince, and in the same instant they leaped to their feet. The man was recognized.

Murphy and Gowney made a dash for him at once.

In the same moment that Duncan found the door locked, their hands fell upon his shoulders, and he was jerked backward with a force that carried him off his feet.

There was no chance given for the intrepid detective to defend himself. He could not draw his gun, and before he could even shout they had him pinned by the throat and were dragging him in the direction of that rear room which had already witnessed tragedy.

CHAPTER XIII.

ANOTHER TRAGEDY.

Meantime, what of the Bowery Bantam?

Had he been instantly killed when thrown into that darksome pit?

If not, the chances seemed altogether in favor of his having been horribly maimed by the fall.

Let us see.

It was a sensation of horror for the lad when he felt himself flying off into space, and that into space so dark that he could see no object before him as he went down.

He seemed to be an age in falling. His thoughts were all in a whirl, and in the midst of it all was the one thought as to his fate. He had heard, or read, somewhere of somebody who had fallen off into a dark place and had been impaled on an iron rod.

He wondered if such a fate would be his.

The human mind can cover a great deal of ground in thought in a remarkably short space of time.

Before he could dwell long on that frightful idea, however, the end came. He fell with a loud splash into a body of water and went under, head, neck and heels.

It was a chilling blast, and he rose to the surface spluttering.

Billy could swim like a rat, so he had no dread of immediate drowning, but he realized quickly his predicament.

What if he could not touch bottom? How long would he be able to keep afloat? Would it not have been better if they had tied a stone to his neck and ended it quickly?

As soon as he had recovered his breath he let his feet down.

He found that he could touch bottom, but that he had to hold his head high to keep his chin above water.

It was a desperate situation.

"Well, here's a go," he said to himself. "It was a mighty cold duck at first, but I won't mind that after a minute, till the second chill comes on, and then goodness help me!"

He might expect the second chill in from twenty minutes to an hour.

Wading around the place, he found that it was not very large, maybe ten feet in the square.

He guessed that it had been built for a cistern, for some purpose or other, but for just what purpose he could not guess, nor did it matter.

His concern was to get out.

The side opposite to where he had been thrown in was not as deep as the other.

Here the water was only about up to his armpits, and, naturally, that was the side where he stopped to think what move he should make next.

Feeling along the wall, he tried to discover something by which he might climb to the top, but nothing was there. He made the round once more with that in view.

"No use," he said to himself. "They have put me in a pickle to stay, and I guess I am booked to stay here."

He looked at it in a philosophical manner.

If he could not get out he would probably have to stay. It was one thing or the other.

Returning to where the water was least deep, he stood there turning the situation over in his mind. Without a light he could not tell much about his surroundings.

Presently he began a very careful inspection of the walls.

He passed his hands over every portion of them within his reach, trying to find a loose stone or a hole.

At last, near one corner, he felt a hole, and, to his delight, discovered that one of the stones was slightly loosened. He resolved to begin operations right there.

The hole marked the water height.

It was probable that the water had leaked out at that point to its then level.

Feeling around on the bottom with his feet, he discovered the dislodged stone, and, standing on it, lifted himself a few inches higher out of the water.

He then began his task.

It was a slow, tedious undertaking with nothing to work with.

The stone seemed to be quite loose, but it was of considerable size and it would not come out of its place.

He pulled and tugged at it for some time, till at last he let go of that particular one and tried another and small-

er one which rested just under the larger.

The smaller one came out without much effort.

This had the effect to loosen the larger, and in a little time that, too, was removed.

Dropping them down into the water, Billy stood on them, and this much success encouraging him, he kept on with a will and ere long had removed several of the stones.

This had the effect, though he did not discover it till later, to lower the water in the cistern.

It ran out slowly through the hole he was enlarging.

He was thus engaged, when he heard the sudden tramp of feet over his head and heard the click of the panel.

Having been so long in the darkness, the ray of light that entered the narrow passage from the room above faintly lighted up the cistern so that he could take in its dimensions.

He found that it was about the size he had guessed it to be in the square and about six or eight feet deep, to the surface of the water.

All around was nothing but the grim, cold walls.

Immediately following the click of the panel he heard voices in suppressed but angry tones.

"Do ye think the rat is dead?" asked one.

"Dead sure," said another.

"Better call down and find out while we're fixin' this feller," said the first speaker.

There were steps to the edge of the pit, and a voice called down:

"Hello! you boy!"

The Bantam made no response.

He recognized the voice.

It was that of Red Murphy, and he knew that he could expect no mercy from that quarter.

If they found he was alive, might they not come down there and finish him? He would not give them occasion to do so.

"Naw, he's dead enough," he heard Murphy say.

"Yes, he must be."

"Got that one ready?"

"Yes, get out of the way."

Bowery Bantam's heart was in his throat.

He wondered who they meant. Was it his friend Dunky Douglas?

Red Murphy retreated along the short passage to the room, and immediately came other steps.

They were quick and scuffling in sound; then there was a sudden pause, and the next instant came a loud splash in the water and Billy knew what had happened.

Another victim had been thrown down into the pit.

"Ha! ha!" was the heartless laugh that followed him. "You would have it, so there you are!"

The victim made no response, but in the dim light Billy Block saw the form of a man struggling in the water, yet in a way to indicate that he was bound.

"And there for keeps!" cried another voice. "Come away, Red, and let us get out of this. He would have it, so it is no fault of ours. The blame is all his own. Come!"

They delayed but a few seconds, yet that seemed an age to the boy.

He wanted to go to the rescue before too late to save the man's life, yet he knew that it would be death to him if seen.

Their steps retreated, there was a click

of the panel and the place was plunged in darkness as before. With a hasty push Billy Block waded forward in the direction where he had seen the man struggling.

CHAPTER XIV.

DESPERATE SITUATION.

It was then he discovered that the water had lowered.

It was no more than up to his armpits at the deepest place, and he guessed the cause.

He reached the man in a moment, and, feeling for his head, found it and with a jerk landed him right end up, with considerable despatch if not with the greatest care.

The man was gasping and wheezing terribly.

Billy felt for his face, and found that he had been gagged before being thrown in.

It was but the work of a moment for the Bantam to take a knife from his pocket and cut the gag away, and, having done so, he pounded the man on the back desperately.

In a few seconds he had the man coughing at a lively rate, and knew that he was successful.

"Dunky," he exclaimed in a whisper, "is it you?"

"Yes," was the gasped response.

That was all the detective could attempt to say yet, but it was enough for his faithful little ally.

"Jingo!" the Bantam cried. "A wonder dey didn't cut yer t'roat before dey chucked ye in. Reckon I wouldn't been much use to ye if dey had done dat, cully."

It was some time before the detective could make rejoinder.

Meanwhile, the Bantam felt around and found where his arms were tied and cut the cords that held him.

Likewise, too, he ducked under, much as he disliked that performance, and liberated his feet, and, having so done, Douglas was able to stand alone without assistance.

Duncan had been well-nigh strangled.

"Ain't yer got yer wind yet?" asked the Bantam.

"I came pretty near not getting it, that's a fact," was the response. "If you had not been here, Billy, it would have been all day with me."

"And mebbly it will be all day with us anyhow, cul."

"It will not be the fault of those villains if it isn't. It is a wonder you are not dead; this water is enough to kill you."

"Yes, it's mighty cold, dat's a fack," agreed the Bantam.

"Have you found no way of getting out?"

"No, not even a rat hole."

"And yet we have got to get out somehow. It will be terrible to die here."

"And have 'em tellin' how nice dey dumped Dunky Duncan and his boy pal, hey? Yes, dat will be nice, now won't it? Dunky, we must git out."

"I quite agree with you, my lad, but how?"

"Dat's de Q."

"What have you been doing?"

"Well, I have been pullin' stones out of de wall."

"Where?"

"In one corner. It has let out some of de water if it ain't done nothin' else."

"That is enough, I should say, for a beginning. Show me the place, and if we can get rid of this water it will be a big stroke in our favor. I am chilled to the bone."

"Don't reckon I'll show you much here in dis blackness," said the Bantam.

"Well, feel me to the place, then, if that is better."

"All right, I'll find it."

Billy felt around till he came to the corner where he had removed the stones, and to his delight found that the water was down to the bottom of the last hole he had made.

Duncan was soon at work, and his greater strength speedily brought down a portion of the wall.

The water did not go out with any rush, of course, but the earth took it in as rapidly as possible, the cement of the cistern having been all that held it.

There, that will do for the water, and now for ourselves," said the detective.

"I guess de water will have de easiest time gettin' out, cul."

"Yes, I think so, too."

"If we only had a light to see what we's about."

"I have got matches in a waterproof box, or said to be such, and I guess this will test its quality."

"Bully! Let's have de glims."

"But with my hands so wet I would spoil them getting them out."

"Dat's so. Jes' as bad off as if we hadn't 'em. Dunky, we are in a doose of a fix, do ye know it?"

"We shall be if we don't get out of here."

"And what if we do get out?"

"That is the question. They will have thrown us off the track by that time."

"Oh, will dey? On yer life dey won't, cully."

"What do you mean?"

"I mean dat I am on to deir bunko, see?"

"No, I can't see anything. What have you found out?"

Billy Block quickly told his story, repeating the scheme he had heard concocted among Ryan, Gowney and the murderer.

The information rather excited the detective.

"So that fellow was right here, was he?" he cried. "We have got to get out of this, Billy, somehow—we have got to do it! We must not waste a minute, either."

"I'm as anxious as you are, boss."

"We'll have to take down some more of the wall, and maybe we can climb to the top."

"Down with 'er! I am ready fer anything, I tell ye."

Duncan applied himself to the task, and in a little while he had so undermined a portion of the wall that it came down with a rush.

He had before that placed Billy in an opposite corner, telling him to stand there, and on the first sound to indicate the fall he himself sprang back out of the way.

The water by this time had receded till it was no deeper than up to the Bantam's middle.

"Good fer you!" cried Billy.

"It won't be good for you if you don't speak in lower tone," the detective warned.

"Scuse me, Dunky, I didn't think, in my delight. If you fetch another fall like dat you will have de whole shebang down, sure's you live."

"And that would be too much of a good thing. Come, you shin up here and see if you can feel where you are at when you get to the top."

"I have got a better plan," said the Bantam.

"What is that?"

"I have been dryin' my hands best I could, an' I think dat I could light one of dem matches if dey's any good, see?"

"All right, you may try it. Take your left hand and feel in my vest pocket, and keep your right fingers dry for opening the box and getting the matches out."

Bantam followed the directions.

He found the matchbox, and in another moment had it open.

Using care, he got a match out without wetting it and struck it on the wall higher than the water had been.

To their immense satisfaction it ignited.

"Good enough!" chuckled the Bantam.

"We are not so bad off yet, Dunky, are we?"

"And no better off, either," was the reply. "But there is a chance for you to climb up, I guess, and you will be under the floor of the building. Go ahead, and I'll follow you to the top."

"Why not you first, Dunky?"

"You are the smaller and can the more easily slip under the floor."

"Oh! I see. Well, all right, here goes fer it! I'll take de matches wid me."

"Yes, for you may need another if you come to some place where you cannot tell what is before you by the feel of things. I hope you will find a way out of here."

CHAPTER XV.

ESCAPE FOR THE BANTAM.

The Bowery Bantam made ready, and was soon shinning up over the slope of dirt and stones in the dark.

He had taken a survey of the ground while the match lasted and had it pretty well fixed in his mind where he was going, and he aimed to reach a certain beam.

He found it and stopped.

"Are you on top?" asked Douglas.

"Yes, come on."

The detective followed, and they were soon side by side.

Then began the creeping forward under the floor, and ere long they came to a dead wall.

"Dis settles it," said the Bantam. "Here is another wall, wid de house a-settin' down hard on it, and dis is as far as we are goin' ter git, my opinion."

"Light a match and let us see about that, my bantam rooster."

Billy complied.

The light revealed a wall that ran the entire width of the house and down both sides and across the end in the rear.

It inclosed the cistern out of which they had just made their escape, and if there was a cellar, as Billy had before supposed, it must lay just beyond the wall they had reached.

They debated the situation for a few minutes.

It was decided that Billy, being so much the smaller, should make the circuit of the wall to see if there was an opening anywhere.

He set off at once.

It was slow work, for he had to creep along, of course.

Finally, at the rear wall he came to a narrow opening, about a foot in length, fitted with a grating.

He gave a signal that had been agreed upon.

The detective responded to it, and Billy summoned him to come to the place.

After a good deal of exertion and considerable loss of patience the detective reached the point where Billy was, and Billy explained what he had discovered.

"Now, cul," he said, "if you kin pull out dat gratin' I will gree ter git out

through de hole, or bust myself a-tryin. You can do it, I guess, fer it feels mighty rusty to my touch. What do you think about it? Put yer muscle to it, anyhow."

"If I have got any muscle left after that creep. Pull back out of the way and give me a chance."

Billy got back and made room.

Duncan got hold of the grate and tested it.

We have said before that he was noted for his strength.

He believed that he felt it yield a little under the pressure he applied.

Taking a firmer hold, he exerted himself.

There was a rasping, snapping sound for a moment and the grating came loose.

"I knowed yer could do it!" exclaimed the Bantam, in a whisper. "You are a reglar Sampson if ye only knowed it, Dunky!"

"Yes, it is out, if it will do any good now that it is out," said the detective.

"You said you would get through or burst, and I guess you will have to burst if you get through."

"I'll git through if I have ter strip my clothes," said the Bantam, determinedly.

He crept forward and made the attempt.

It was about the closest fit he had ever tried in his life.

In the first place, it did not look as if he could get his head through, to say nothing of his body.

"I'll do it," he declared. "It will only cost me my ears, and I kin spare them in a good cause. Good-by, Dunky, if I never see you any more. I am goin'."

"I'll wait till I see you go before I say good-by," was the response.

Billy wriggled out of his jacket, and, trying again, pushed his head through the narrow opening by main force.

It hurt him not a little, making the tears come to his eyes, but he stood it manfully and forced it. And, having his head out, he believed he could follow it up.

He stopped for a moment to breathe.

Then, letting out his breath and making himself as small as possible, he began to wriggle.

Of all the tight places the Bowery Bantam had ever been in in his life this was about the tightest, as he found, and it looked as if he must stick fast.

One thing was certain, he must go ahead.

There could be no "come back" to the arrangement; it would not work that way.

So he wriggled and wriggled, and little by little he got the thicker portion of his body through, and at last he drew out his legs and was on the outside.

"What did I tell ye, cully?" he demanded.

"I didn't think you could do it, Billy," was the response.

"Your turn now."

"This is no time to fool, Bantam. Everything now depends on you. I have met with bad luck at every turn."

"Well, what yer want me ter do?"

"I want you to go straight to the station and tell Sergeant McGilson where I am and how I'm fixed."

"All right, if I kin git out to do street."

"I was there after I saw you in the square and had that handcuff taken off there and McGilson told me if I wanted help I had only to send for it. He has men ready."

"All right, cul, I'll carry de news to him. What next?"

"Don't say anything of the scheme we

know all about. I still want to tackle it alone."

"Ain't yer had enough of dat?"

"No, I haven't. I want to work a surprise—Say!"

"Say on."

"Why not bring the sergeant here to this hole and let him try to make it bigger, so I can get out?"

"What's dat fer?"

"They will not know I am out, and the surprise will be all the greater when we scoop them."

"All right, cully, you's de boss. A bar will work out some of dese here bricks, and den you kin come out slick as grease. I'll do jes' dat t'ing, sure."

"And another thing."

"Wot's dat?"

"You must be quick, for I am shivering with the cold as it is, and I won't be worth a cent if I have to lie here long, wet as I am."

"Same wid me, boss. I am shiverin' ready to shed my teeth. You bet dat I won't let no grass grow under my feet when once I git out on de street. Now, is dat all?"

"Yes, be off with you, and good luck to you."

"Off it is, boss."

Billy turned away from the hole out of which he had just made his escape and took a survey of his surroundings.

He was in a narrow back yard, behind two high board fences. There was light sufficient for him to see fairly well, after having been in such utter darkness.

Going down the yard to the rear, he there stopped for another survey of the premises.

There was a back door of the dive opening upon this yard.

Billy was half tempted to venture that way.

Prudence, however, prevailed. And, too, he remembered that the front hall door had been locked when he tried it before.

So he gave attention to the fence, scaled it and let himself down on the other side. From there he went over other fences, taking care to keep the location of the dive in mind, and finally he came to an alley that let him out to the street.

Once on the street, he lost no time in carrying out the directions the detective had given him.

CHAPTER XVI.

MCGILSON TO THE RESCUE.

Billy Block bounded into the station like a whirlwind.

A policeman who stood near the door at the moment held up his hands with horror.

"Hold on, scavenger!" he cried. "Don't you come in here with all that dirt now! What hog pen have you been wallowing in? What d'ye want, anyhow? Hold on, I say!"

"Can't hold nothin'!" cried the Bantam. "Where's Sergeant McGilson? I want him, and I want him bad!"

"Who the mischief are you?"

"Billy Block."

"The deuce! You are a fine-looking specimen, I must say. What have you been up to?"

"I tell ye I ain't got no time ter talk," cried the Bantam. "Where is de sergeant? I must see him right away sooner, fer there is somethin' on ice dat won't keep long, I tell ye!"

"Here I am, boy; what is it?"

The sergeant at that moment appeared.

"Why, Dunky Duncan is in a fix and sent me to you for help."

"Ha! is that so? Why didn't you say so at once? Tell me about it as quick as you can."

"Scat! I couldn't git in a word fer this duffer, who wanted ter pitch me out headlong 'cause I didn't come in a swaller-tail coat and buff kids, or somethin' like that—"

"There, there, never mind that; tell me where Douglas is and what word he sends."

"All right, cully. Ye know Toby Grimm's dive?"

"Certainly."

"Well, dat's where he is."

"Enough. Call out ten men, Jimson."

The policeman hastened into a rear room where the reserve were napping to call them forth.

"Now, the particulars," said the sergeant to Billy.

"Soon told," said Billy. "Dey put him an' me into a cistern full of water ter drown us, but we got out of dat fix and I got out from under de crib by creepin' through a small hole in the wall, but Dunky is there yet, 'cause he is too big ter git out."

"The wretches!"

"Yes, somethin' like that, I 'gree with ye. He said fer me ter come ter you and git you ter come with a bar and make de hole big enough fer him to git through. He don't want yer to pull de ranch, see?"

"Then why didn't you say so?"

"Yer didn't give me time."

"Well, is that all of it, now?"

"Dat's about all. You and one man will do de biz, and I'll take ye to de place where Dunky is waitin' fer ye. He don't want ye to let a breath of dis git out, see?"

"Yes, I begin to see now. Never mind the men, Jimson. You and I will be enough for what is wanted. Clarke will take my place till I come back."

So, with a few trifling details to arrange, they set forth under the guidance of the Bowery Bantam.

Billy was shivering in his wet clothes, but he kept dancing about to keep his blood moving.

They went at a rapid pace, and he was presently warm enough.

On the way they consulted as to the best means of reaching the rear of the dive, and decided that the same way Billy had come out was the best way to reach the desired point.

Accordingly, when they came to the alley the Bantam led them in and guided them over the fences to the rear of the building.

They approached with due silence.

The policemen were armed, and were ready to use their weapons if it became necessary.

As soon as they reached the desired point and had stopped to make sure that no one had discovered their presence, Billy Block got down to the opening and whispered:

"Dunky!"

"Yes, I'm here," was the response.

"Had a notion ye would be," said Billy. "I have got help."

"Then let them get to work as soon as possible, for I am about dead with chill."

This Billy repeated, and the sergeant took the bar in hand and began as silently as possible to try to work out some of the bricks.

It was found that they could not get along very fast without a light, depending on the sense of touch for the placing of the point of the bar, but it was thought best to have no light.

With greatest care they proceeded, and

after a time of patient work the bricks began to come loose and drop out.

They had not made a sound loud enough to draw attention.

Finally the hole was large enough for Douglas to attempt to crawl out, and he tried it.

He had enough room and came through without any trouble, having first passed through such things as remained with him, Billy's coat, the grating and some of the bricks.

"I owe my life to you, Billy," he said. "I won't forget it, either. Neither will I forget the gang that put me there, curse them!"

"Do you want the den pulled?" asked the sergeant.

"No, I have their scheme now, and we'll give them a big surprise party tomorrow."

"All right, just as you say about that. But, come, let's get to the station, where you can warm up and put something in your boiler to keep you from taking your death of cold."

"We must fix this hole up first."

"How?"

"Fit in some of the bricks as best we can and stand the grating in place, so it will pass muster unless inspected too closely."

This the detective insisted on, and it was done.

Then they hastened from the scene.

At the station the detective and Billy Block changed their clothes and took something warm, and washed up. After that they turned in to bunk and got some refreshing sleep.

When morning came Duncan Douglas was ready for the business of the day, having, thanks to the Bowery Bantam, the correct cue to the whole scheme for the getting of Kilgore Stiver out of the city from under the very noses of the watchful police.

Meantime, what of the evil clique?

After disposing of the detective they had been able to draw a full breath and consider.

Having a desperate case in hand, they had been obliged to adopt desperate means for its accomplishment, and had stopped at nothing to gain their ends in view.

John Ryan had already left the dive.

He had gone straight to the hotel, where he registered for himself and wife under an assumed name.

He explained that his wife had been invited to spend the night with a friend, but would probably join him at the hotel on the following morning, when they might remain for some time.

Of that, however, he could not be certain; they might depart very early next morning.

That did not matter, however; money counted.

He paid the score.

Red Murphy and Boss Gowney attended to their part of the scheme and procured the needed disguise for the convict.

A woman's outfit was obtained, of mourning material, with a bonnet and heavy veil, and everything needful for the perfecting of the deception, and a woman's help was obtained to fit it to the wearer.

Before morning everything had been made ready, and there did not appear to be the least flaw in the arrangements. It seemed as if it must work with success. The only detective who had been giving them trouble had been removed, no one would ever know what had become of him, and Kilgore Stiver would never be retaken.

CHAPTER XVII.

DETECTIVE DUNCAN'S BOLD CHARGE.

Judge Tehndaiz was seated in his office on this morning.

It was he who had Kilgore Stiver's case under consideration at the time of the prisoner's strange escape from custody.

He had been withholding sentence for a few days while he looked into certain particulars of the case, as we have mentioned, and on the day of the escape he visited the prisoner in his cell.

The door opened and a young man entered the office.

He was one we have seen before, of medium height, strong build, and with face of expressed determination.

It was Dunk Duncan.

"Good morning, judge," he said, removing his hat.

"Good morning, young man," was the response. "Well, what news do you bring me?"

"I hardly know, sir," in a thoughtful manner. "It looks as if Kilgore Stiver would make his escape in spite of all the precautions of the police," and he scanned the judge closely while saying it.

His face seemed to lighten.

"You think so?"

"I said that is the way it looks."

At that his penetrating eyes discovered that the judge's inward feeling was of chagrin, or alarm.

"What do you mean?" the judge asked.

"I mean that it is not certain that he will escape."

"You think, then, that you can possibly apprehend him yet? Then you must have a clew."

"Well, I have."

In spite of his effort the judge betrayed emotion.

A less capable detective might have taken it for excitement for the recovery of the prisoner. Dunk Duncan read it differently, and believed that he had made no mistake in a conclusion he had reached.

"What is it? I am, of course, deeply interested. I would give anything for his retaking."

"Are you sure of that, judge? Would you not rather have him escape?"

The judge sprang to his feet, his brows contracted and his face furious.

"Have you come here to insult me?" he thundered.

"Not at all, sir. I am here for the purpose of having a plain understanding with you."

"What do you mean?"

"Well, the fact of the matter is, I am onto the game."

The judge's face paled.

"What game?" he asked hoarsely.

"The game of getting Kilgore Stiver out of the grasp of the law."

"Young man, you are dreaming. Do you forget to whom you are talking? Do you forget my position, sir?"

"Not at all, sir."

"I think you do. I demand a full explanation, sir."

The judge was pacing the floor, evidently in a furious mood, but the detective read alarm in his every word and action.

"Well, you shall have it, judge," he said. "Boss Gowney has let out the whole matter and you might as well confess to the part you played in it. Nothing can save—"

The judge sank upon a chair as limp as a rag.

"In heaven's name, have mercy!" he cried. "You must never reveal what you know. By heavens—"

"Keep cool, sir, keep cool!" warned the triumphant expert, for now he well knew that his surmise was right—that his desperate ruse had succeeded.

What other man would have dared to face Judge Tehndaiz and make such a charge as he had hinted?

"I am lost, ruined," the judge sighed, his head and arm hanging limp. "God knows I was forced to do what I did; I could not help it. In fact, I would do the same thing over again were occasion to arise."

"I believe you would, sir," assented the detective.

"You know all about it, then?"

"Could I have made the charge without knowing?" counter-questioned the cautious Duncan.

Nevertheless, he was still in the dark concerning the matter. He did not know yet the mystery of Kilgore Stiver's escape from the jail, nor did any one else save the judge and his confederates.

"True, true," the judge sighed. "And you, what are you going to do about it, sir?"

"That remains to be seen."

"What do you hint?"

"Nothing."

"You say so, but do you mean it?"

"I assure you, sir, that I meant nothing by what I said."

"Maybe not; you would say that anyhow. I am not a poor man, Mr. Douglas, and I will give you ten thousand dollars to let Kilgore Stiver get safely away."

The detective could hardly contain himself.

Here was something, fixing the responsibility upon the judge, and yet something that would not amount to anything without a witness.

He might say the judge had said thus and so, but if the judge denied it it would place Duncan in a bad situation. That was a small point, however; the judge believed the matter to be fully known and would doubtless act accordingly.

While they were talking thus the door opened and into the room stepped—Boss Gowney.

This was something Dunk Duncan had not counted on.

At sight of the man-hunter, Gowney looked like a ghost and recoiled a step, but instantly the expert whipped out a revolver, ordering him to sit down on a certain chair, adding:

"Don't take me for a ghost, Mr. Gowney, though it is not your fault that I am not in the spirit rather than in the body at this moment. I am real enough, I assure you."

"How the dev—"

"There, now; don't grow excited about it. Here I am; let that suffice for the present. Keep your seat where you are, or take the consequences."

Duncan blew a whistle.

"Why did you give it away?" demanded the judge of Gowney. "Why did you go back on me like that?"

"Gone back on ye!" in the greatest amaze.

"Yes, telling this detective the whole matter, so that he came here and—"

"I have done nothing of the kind, I swear it!"

"You have not told—"

"Not a word."

"No, not in words, perhaps," chipped in Douglas, smiling, "but as good as in words by other means."

"My curse on you!" cried the judge. "I took you for my friend, Douglas, and here you have turned against me and trapped me."

"And I took you for an honest judge, really eager to have the escaped prisoner

recaptured. I thought so up to the moment of my coming here this morning, when my suspicion turned against you. I came here to tell you that I have now a clew to the prisoner's whereabouts and am going to arrest him within the hour."

"That is a lie!" cried Gowney. "That is another bluff, judge. Are we going to stand it?"

CHAPTER XVIII.

MYSTERY SOLVED.

The door opened again, but this time to admit a policeman, with two more directly behind him.

Their eyes stuck out with amaze at what they beheld. And with them was the boyish Bowery Bantam!

Billy was in respectable attire once more and was altogether a likely-looking lad. He, too, showed the surprise he felt, and looked from his comrade to the two men he held covered.

"You lied to me!" cried the judge. "You said that you did not know of this till the moment of your coming here, and yet here are policemen whom you had with you. Oh! I wish I had you at the bar and could send you up for twenty years!"

Duncan smiled serenely.

"No doubt you would take pleasure in doing it, sir. But you wrong me. It was as I told you. These men were simply awaiting me, to go to the arrest of the escaped convict. And I find that no time is to be spared now. Officers, arrest these men and have them held at the station until I appear to make charges against them."

There was no help for it; the expert had the authority, and his order had to be obeyed.

"Will you have no consideration for me?" asked the judge. "You have tricked and trapped us; will you not let me have a chance—"

"A chance for what, sir?"

"Well, will you drag me to the station like a common thief?"

"Would you prefer to remain here until I return with my other prisoner, sir? If so—"

"Yes, yes, let it be that way."

"Very well."

So Duncan changed his order, and the policemen were left there to guard the two men as prisoners in the office, and he and the Bowery Bantam set out to intercept the escaped murderer.

The detective expert had already posted some capable allies near the hotel, and had given them sufficient of the story to enable them to detect Kilgore Stiver should he attempt to escape before the time arranged.

When he and Billy Block neared the hotel they met one of these men. To the detective's inquiry if their man had yet come out from the hotel the answer was that he had not.

That was sufficient, and Dunk Duncan and the Bantam waited for his reappearance.

He had not a great while to wait. Ere long Mr. John Ryan made his appearance, with a woman clad in deepest mourning leaning heavily upon his arm, and they moved slowly down the street.

The signal was given, the allies closed in and followed their game for some distance before they made the arrest.

They waited till the suspects were at the nearest point to the police station.

As they gained distance the rascals gained confidence and walked at a quicker pace, until finally the very gait of the man in female attire would almost have given him away had any one noted it particularly.

The detectives now closed in, and Dunk

Duncan stepped out in front of Ryan and his companion and brought them to a stop. At the same time his allies laid hands on their shoulders.

The surprise was complete.

Ryan uttered an oath, and the convict tried to get away.

"No use!" warned Douglas. "The best thing you can do is to come right along without any fuss."

Which they quickly decided to do, and they were taken to the office of the judge, from whence it was Douglas' intention to take all to the station together.

Meanwhile another officer or two had been sent for Red Murphy and Toby Grimm, and they had been arrested.

They had just been brought to the station when Duncan arrived with his prisoners.

"When they entered Grimm and Murphy almost collapsed at sight of the detective, whom they supposed they had sent to his death the night before.

They stared at Duncan as if their eyes would bulge out of their heads, and it was hard for them to realize that he actually stood before them in the flesh.

"Oh! yer kin look!" cried the Bowery Bantam, dancing around in delight. "Here we are both of us, lively as crickets, you bet! It will take more'n that to put us out of the world, bet your life on it! You thought you had us done brown, but yer didn't, see?"

They saw!

There they were, prisoners every one of them! The veil was torn from Kilgore Stiver's face and he was recognized.

The judge and the prisoner looked at each other, the prisoner with something of a ferocious expression, at first, while that the judge bestowed upon him was one of pity.

"Did *you* lay this trap for me?" the murderer demanded.

"No, but fate has been against you," was the response. "I did everything in my power for you."

"And I am der fate dat was onto yer haze, you bet!" chimed in the Bowery Bantam. "I got der facks of der case an' b'iled 'em down till I knowed der whole matter, see?"

"I'd like to boil *you* down!" grated Boss Gowney.

"Why didn't yer when yer had de chance?" the Bantam bantered.

Dunk Duncan made his formal charges against the prisoners, and they were entered.

When he came to the judge that crestfallen magnate said:

"No, not me! You cannot make me a prisoner here. Let me tell you a simple story:

"This convicted murderer here before you is my own brother! He has been a disgrace to the family, and out of respect has been living under other names than his real one; but blood is thicker than water. When he was brought before me I could not sentence him. I recalled what he was to me, and resolved to save him if I could.

"I planned it, and with the help of one of the prison keepers carried it out. I called upon the prisoner in his cell about the time of day when the guardsmen changed their places. I was let in by the one who aided me—he has died since, so I do him no harm by telling. I gave my clothes to the prisoner and left at once.

"When the other guardsman came on he was told that Judge Tehndalz was in the cell with the murderer and would probably soon want to go out, and when the prisoner appeared clad in my habitual attire he was allowed to pass un-

challenged, and when the cell was next visited it was found empty. It might have been a mystery to the end of time had it not been for this tireless young detective. I do not blame him; I only regret that it happened."

"It is all up with me," said the prisoner.

"One word with you before we part," said the judge. "May I speak in private, officers?"

Every eye was dimmed, and the request was granted. The judge approached his brother, and for a moment they stood close together, the judge talking rapidly.

Suddenly each raised something to his lips, and then, taking hold of hands, they said a good-by and soon sank to the floor, deathly pallor overspreading their faces!

They had taken a poison, and before help could be summoned they had both expired.

It was one of the greatest sensations in police circles, but it was kept from the press. The facts in the case were never made known to the public. It was hushed up as much as possible by the authorities and soon passed out of the minds of all save those who had been most intimately concerned in it.

There are two who can never forget it. Needless to say, they are Duncan Douglas and his little ally, the Bowery Bantam, who to-day are very much alive as detective experts of exceptional ability.

THE END.

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